

Only Increased Taxes Prevent Huge Deficit, Avers Liberal Critic

Harold Fisher Launches Slashing Attack on Financial Record of Ferguson Government, and Hints That Plan Is to Raise Cry of "Bankruptcy or Booze"

BOOTLEGGERS LIST READ BY NESBITT

Plea for More Power in Eastern Ontario Is Made by Carleton Member, Who Says Private Interests Must Act if Government Continues Delay

With six speeches on the Budget, the Ontario Legislature last night measurably lessened the distance before adjournment, which is generally conceded for late next week. Indeed, many members hung around the chamber during the early part of last night's sitting anticipating the end of the Budget debate and a division on the Brackin amendment.

Harold Fisher, K.C., Liberal member for Ottawa, Liberal financial critic, paid his compliments to the Government with the declaration that they were "champion spenders" as well as champion collectors"; Russell Nesbitt, Toronto Conservative, criticized results of O.T.A. operation in urban centres; J. G. Lethbridge (Progressive, West Middlesex) condemned as "propaganda" many of the "wet" utterances being made in the Legislature; A. H. Acres (Conservative, Carleton) criticized the Government for failure to provide hydro power in Eastern Ontario; Tom Kennedy (Conservative, Peel) said many people thought ex-Attorney-General Raney's election expenses of 1923 were paid by Abe Orpen, and A. C. Lewis, Conservative, Toronto, pleaded the cause of the soldiers.

Impressive Addresses.

The day's speechmaking was rather above the ordinary in the Legislature, particularly the speeches of Mr. Fisher and Mr. Acres. The West Ottawa member reviewed the Provincial financial situation in a comprehensive way, and was very critical of the Administration. Mr. Acres, in one of his few speeches during the three years he has been in the House, made an impressive demand on behalf of Eastern Ontario for hydro power consideration at the hands of the Government, and in earnest terms pleaded the cause of agriculture.

Leslie Oke, U.F.O. member for East Lambton, moved the adjournment of the debate at 11.15.

Quotes "Truth" From Papers.

Harold Fisher, member for East Ottawa, and the recognized financial critic of the Liberal group, continued the debate. After congratulating Provincial Treasurer Price on his Budget speech, which he termed "a remarkable effort, considering what little there was to report," Mr. Fisher launched himself off on systematic sniping of the Government's position with regard to the financial condition of the Province today.

Stating that newspaper headlines bearing on the Budget speech had been thoroughly misleading and in some cases absolutely false, Mr. Fisher asked leave to quote some headings that represented the actual state of affairs. Some he gave the House were: "Gasoline and beer taxes produce new revenue of \$2,345,000, but notwithstanding Provincial Treasurer shows deficit of \$5,107,000." "Ferguson Government takes \$6,000,000 more from the people than in 1924, and \$12,500,000 more than in 1923, but shows a balance on the wrong side of \$5,000,000." "Ferguson Government, pledged to economy, last year spent \$1,500,000 more than in 1924." "Since Ferguson Government came into power there has been added to the Provincial debt (not including Hydro) \$67,000,000."

Attacks Accounting.

Stating that the Government had been content to go ahead piling up Provincial debt, Mr. Fisher criticized the Provincial Treasurer's bookkeeping system. "The Provincial Treasurer," he said, "charges ordinary expenditures. Very good—as bookkeeping. But when it comes to financing what does he do? He pays his great deficits in ordinary expenditures out of capital. He issues long-term bonds; and members' indemnities, salaries of civil servants, and all the things that make up the deficits, will be paid by generations yet unborn."

Ridicules "Surplus."

Mr. Fisher ridiculed the Government's stand that it had done well by virtue of the fact that the deficit this year was less than "the horrible year of 1923." This might be true, Mr. Fisher said, but the present deficit was greater than anything prior to 1923. Attacking the Provincial Treasurer's belief that the Province would have a surplus of \$2,000,000 if it was unnecessary to pay interest charges, Mr. Fisher said: "A man might as well say: 'If I did not have to pay rent I would be able to live within my income. Therefore, I will segregate rent in my books (as the Provincial Treasurer is doing with his interest charges), spending more than I make, and borrow the rest.'"

Suggesting that the Government's failure to do away with deficits might be due to either want of courage or because it was guided solely by political expediency, Mr. Fisher went on to show that the debenture debt of the Province was not vastly lowered, as represented, but vastly increased. In three years, he stated, \$66,917,000 had been added to the Provincial debt; "which figure," he explained, "may mean something when it is pointed out that in 1915 the total public debt of the Province was but \$50,465,423."

Charging the Government with

being the champion tax collector as well as spender, Mr. Fisher said that there was taken from the pockets of the people of Ontario in 1925 six million dollars more than in 1924, and twelve and a half millions more than in 1923. "This Government," he declared, "chooses to adopt as its standard the horrible year, 1923, when the Drury Government did the bookkeeping and the Ferguson Government did the spending. The Provincial Treasurer is fond of 'ifs.' Let me give him one. If in the year 1925 the revenue had remained the same as in 1923, the deficit this last year would have been \$17,500,000. Any improvement is not due to economy, but to more taxes."

"Bankruptcy or Booze."

Touching for a moment on the question of Government control, Mr. Fisher said: "It is rumored that the huge deficits are being piled up year after year for the deliberate purpose of making an argument for Government control. We are told that the Government is going to the country with the slogan, 'Bankruptcy or Booze.' There are perhaps some lessons to be learned from the beer fiasco. Beer has never been our national drink."

"Hear, hear!" put in Col. J. A. Currie.

Unruffled, Mr. Fisher claimed that the habits of people had changed; that young men had lost the habit of sitting around drinking as they once did; that they are driving motor cars and engaging in all kinds of sports. In Ottawa, he said, the whole population of young people was now skiing.

"Whis-keying," said Mark Vaughan.

"No," said Mr. Fisher. "Ottawa had become the greatest skiing centre in the world. Today we would probably turn out as many as 15,000 people on skis."

"On skids, you mean," the Conservative benches corrected.

"Old Story," He Says.

Again turning his sarcasm on the Provincial Treasurer, Mr. Fisher said: "His stunt this year is to be a plan for wiping out the Provincial debt. I wouldn't exactly call this a thriller; but it is one of the funniest acts ever put on. Here we have a Government that cannot pay its way in the present proposing a scheme to pay off the Provincial debt in the future. It is the same old story of the spendthrift: 'Lend me another \$5 and I will pay you all I owe you in six months.'"

Dealing at some length with the report of the Committee on Retirement of the Provincial Debt, Mr. Fisher expressed the feeling that the plan was workable, provided a Government could be got which really wanted it to work. "It's very easy to make plans," said he; "but what assurance has the Province that the Government will go ahead with them? What is there in the conduct of this Government to inspire confidence that any plan will be carried out? Why have we not had tax reductions in the past? Why does it not balance its Budget?"

Sees Crime Increase.

Following, and dealing with the question of the Ontario Temperance Act, Russell Nesbitt (Conservative, Northwest Toronto) quoted statistics from Provincial institutions to show that the inmates were continually increasing in numbers. The Fort William farm population was the largest in history; and the Superintendent of the Mercer Reformatory had number in her report the increasing number of young girls coming in to the Mercer.

"I think I have convinced this House by statistics," he said, "that, as far as the O.T.A. is concerned, it certainly is not diminishing crime."